The Kirana Legacy

Celebrating 70 years of
Ustad Niaz Ahmed Khan

Dr. Ashok Da. Ranade Archives (ADRA), Pune

from: Ustad Fayyaz Hussain Khan
gift
19/3/09

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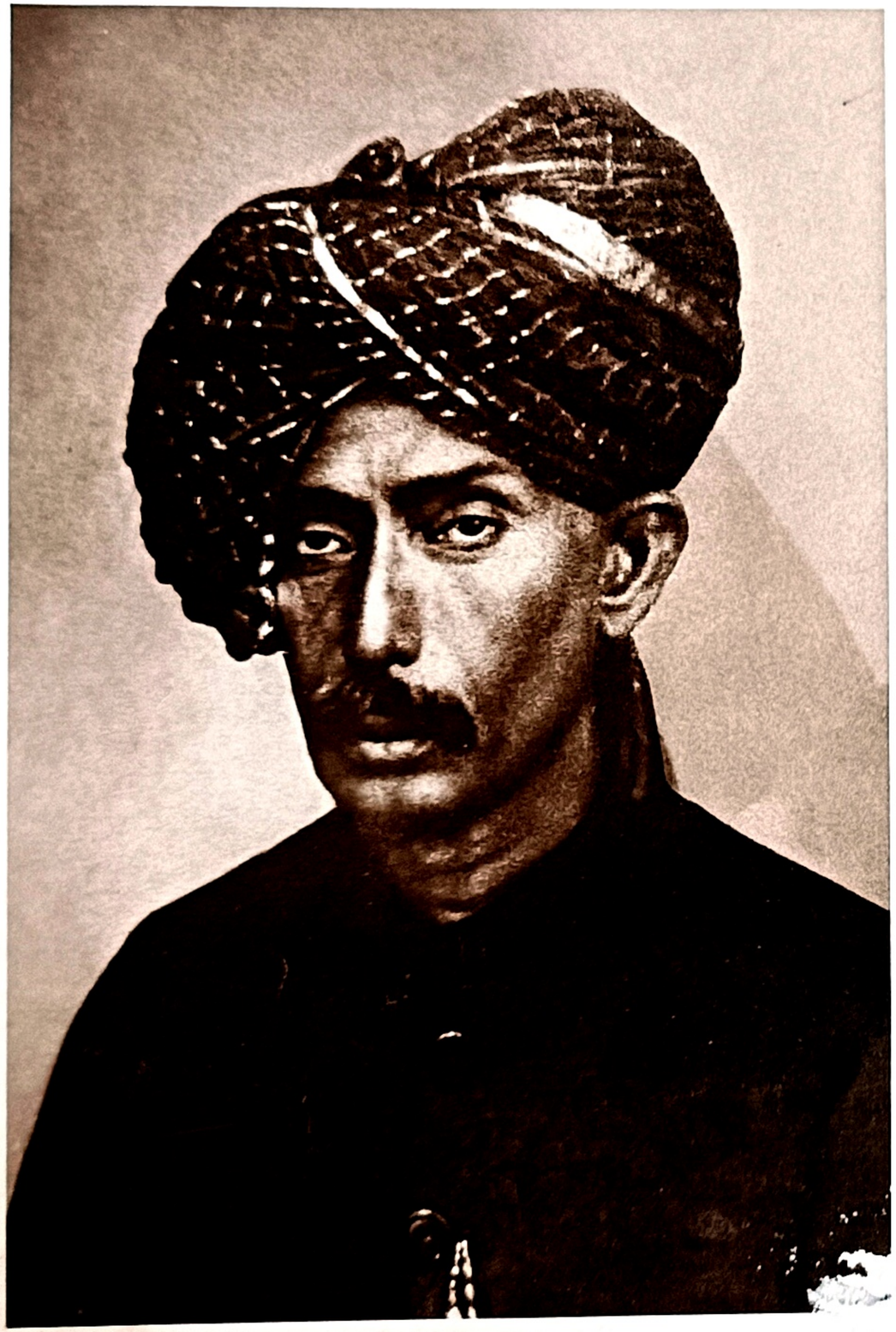
Reflections on the Kirana Legacy

When we speak of the *gharana* of a traditional musician, we mean the family traits of the music he practises and owes allegiance to. The concept of musical *gharanas* is physically comparable to that of families or clans in general, but in reality it is far more extensive and complicated. It signifies not only the physical characteristics, temperamental leanings and attitudes of the founder, in the same way as it would in the case of the ancestral line of a family, but much else that is contributed by all the talent that has come to drink at the fount of the master. This interaction and experience leave an enduring imprint on the common pool of the *gharana's* wealth.

A musical *gharana* invariably grows around the genius of a creative master whose achievements automatically attract a collection of aspirants, admirers, and disciples. Traditionally, these masters command the kind of unqualified reverence that is associated with religious gurus. Their followers not only unquestioningly adhere to the musical principles laid down by them but also unconsciously imitate the physical characteristics of their role models. This small nucleus grows and widens as the style associated with the master gains prestige and acceptability among music lovers. Each *gharana* has a temperament since it reflects and carries within itself the seeds of the personality of the master with whom it originated. The outstanding *khayal gharanas* today are Gwalior, Agra, Kirana, Jaipur-Athrauli, and Patiala, each named after the original place of residence of the *ustad* or family of *ustads* around whom closely guarded musical guilds grew and flourished. It is fascinating to observe how the traits, aptitudes and predilections of a master mould the musical approach and attitudes of a *gharana.*

Practitioners of the Gwalior *gharana,* the oldest of all *khayal gharanas,* clearly show their respect for both the vigour and the rigour of older religious forms such as *dhrupad* and



Ustad Abdul Karim Khan

give precedence to the demands of the *bandish* over that of their personal musical urges. Their aim is to adhere strictly to the structure and frame of the composition they are presenting even while improvising freely and spontaneously. Both the rhythmic and melodic aspects share the musician's attention equally. This can be quite a feat of musicianship.

The Agra *gharana* is known for bold, staccato movements and full-throated evocations in which rhythmic interplay is used to enhance the persuasiveness of the music. The ideal that all singers of this *gharana* try to imitate is the overt, and robust style of emoting that was characteristic of Ustad Faiyyaz Khan, their idol.

The Kirana *gharana* traces delicate three-dimensional arcs, and draws from silence deeply searching spirals. The true Kirana musician believes that each *jagah* or 'place' in the scale of a raga is not a point but a musical area that must be explored anew each time and brought to life in the living moment. This introspective approach is also reflected in their style of raga development. The base of the edifice they build up, that is the *sa* and the *mandra saptak*, claim the greatest attention. Once the foundation is laid, the angles of the rising structure are gently indicated while the apex is often left to the imagination of the listener, in deference to the underlying philosophy that a mere human does not have the ability to perfect or complete anything, including the portrait of a raga.

The Athrauli-Jaipur gayaki of which Ustad Alladiya Khan was the champion is known for its sharply etched and brilliant *alankars* or note patterns. The typical presentational model of this *gharana* is to outline the entire *bandish* in medium tempo at the outset and then to embellish and underline the structure with scintillating patterns of rhythm and melody. The strength of this music lies not in the nuance of expression or emotion but in the fluency and the sparkling clarity and energy of the musical utterance which can be likened to a finely cut diamond.

The Patiala *gayaki* stresses the presentational aspect and achieves its effect through an exuberance of spirit and a sense of abandon. The music often takes the form of a series of build-ups and climaxes, where the musicality of the moment takes precedence over sense of structure.

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From left to right, Ustad Majid Khan, Ustad Abdul Karim Khan and Ustad Abdul Haqq Khan

Ustad Abdul Waheed Khan

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There are many other *gharanas* and styles in addition to these. The point here is to recognise that each is the embodiment of an outstanding musical personality and each has the potential of attracting to itself like-minded music lovers. The riches of the minds of the masters who have given rise to such a wealth of styles in India can be likened to the immovable property of the members of the *gharana* which include their disciples as well. Another kind of wealth which each *gharana* owns and which we can consider their moveable property is the repertoire of compositions and ragas they specially pride themselves on. This wealth is as jealously guarded by all members who identify themselves with the *gharana* as any other kind of riches and shared only with those who are admitted into the family by right of blood, marriage or exemplary discipleship. By following both the manner and material of musical masters, their disciples give rise to a distinctive stream of musical practice.

The origins of the Kirana *gharana* go back a long way and include the contribution of luminaries like Bande Ali Khan, the legendary master of the *been*. Kirana is the name of a town near Saharanpur in UP where the emperor Jehangir is said to have resettled many families of musicians after their homes were destroyed in a flood. Many *sarangi* and *sitar* players also trace their ancestry to this town. But the *gayaki* as we know it today is the product of two great musical minds—that of Abdul Karim Khan, and of his nephew Abdul Wahid Khan. Together they are considered the pillars of this musical legacy even though no two temperaments or personalities could be more different. While the uncle's forte was emotional appeal and delicate lyricism, the nephew's music was celebrated for its intellectual vigour, purity of raga and relentless sense of structure. Abdul Karim Khan overwhelmed the listener with feeling, while Abdul Wahid Khan challenged his mind to its limits. Both are capable of miraculous musical feats in their separate ways. The manner of these two masters was followed by their respective disciples, thus giving rise to two distinct sub-streams of musical practice within the Kirana school.

Ustad Rajab Ali Khan

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The Two Streams of a River

Despite the seemingly wide differences in the musical manner of these two pillars of the Kirana *gharana*, their approach and concerns had much in common at a deeper level. What they shared distinguished them clearly from all other *gharanas*. And was more vital and decisive than any physical dissimilarities could be. The common lineage that nurtured them had implanted in both their psyches an almost exclusive preoccupation with raga development. Both considered a sincere and penetrating search for *swara* more important than presentational aspects such as *taal* and ornamentation. Both chose depth over variety, suggestion over statement, quality over quantity, and the subtle and sophisticated over the overt and the obvious. Both shared the same concept of the unbroken melodic line which in the case of the Kirana *gayaki* arises from silence, stretches and gains body in an arc and fades back into silence, without any abrupt breaks, angles or jerks. For both the masters it is an article of faith that the exact place of a note in its surrounding aura has to be searched for and discovered anew every time a phrase is attempted. Its exact position cannot be taken for granted as though one had fixed it on the harmonium. Both masters are more attracted to the slow tempo than to the *drut* since the leisurely pace affords the opportunity to explore the contours of the raga in greater detail. Both demonstrate in their practice that concentration on a small musical area, whether it is a single raga, or three notes in it, is more rewarding than restlessly moving from raga to raga, or indiscriminately adding to one's collection of compositions. In deference to this conviction, both prefer to present serious ragas that have a rich development potential and are not usually attracted to sweet-sounding, or popular ragas that do not seriously challenge the mind.

This tendency can be seen in all singers of the Kirana school who specialise in profound creations like Todi, Yaman, Shuddha Kalyan, Puriya and Darbari and do not generally

Ustad Abdul Gafoor Khan, father of Ustad Shakoor Khan

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attempt easy to please ragas like Chayanat, Nand, Desh and Khamaj. Not only that. They tend to treat even a light raga with so much depth that it acquires new characteristics. Abdul Karim Khan's Abhogi Kanhra is a case in point. The original Karnatic raga that was the inspiration for it is beautiful and lyrical, but nowhere as profound and majestic as the conception of the raga as envisioned by singers of the Kirana *gharana*.

Abdul Wahid Khan was once asked why he limited himself to only two ragas, Todi and Darbari, which he practised day in and day out. His response was that he would have dropped the second one also if morning time could last forever. One lifetime, according to him, was not enough to do justice to any raga. He was forced to change from Todi to something else only because of the setting sun and the gathering darkness.

The musical values that these two great masters held dear to their hearts in their own individual ways were broadly the same. All musicians of the Kirana school are aware of the two main streams that they represent within the same value system and consciously adhere to one or the other, or a combination of the two, in a proportion which is congenial to their musical personalities. They are also aware that despite superficial differences in manner, both streams address themselves to the same musical concerns. The similarities outweigh the differences and establish a common ancestry.

Supremacy of swara

The Kirana gharana developed in response to a deep urge for personal self-expression. Masters like Abdul Karim Khan concentrated their entire attention on the poignancy and nuance of the *swara* and did not make very active use of rhythm in creating the desired effect. The luminosity and exact placing of the swara in the raga became so important to the practitioners of this style that they laid themselves open to the charge by other *gharanas* of neglecting the *tala* and the *bandish*. In this sense the Kirana *gharana* was an unorthodox, even in some senses an erratic development. In order to give the utmost latitude to the *alap* element, which is the most evocative and emotive part of raga delineation, both Abdul Karim Khan and Abdul Wahid Khan reduced the tempo of the *bada khayals* to the slowest it had ever been in the history of the *khayal*. It was their conviction that the meditative, contemplative and

Ustad Abdul Bashir Khan father of Ustads Faiyyaz Ahmed and Niaz Ahmed Khan Sarangi-nawaz and court musician at Jaipur

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emotional aspects of music, which attracted them most, could not possibly be coaxed out of music at a brisk pace. This development resulted in impressive feats of musicality at a very high level, and began to be imitated by other *gharanas* as a necessary condition for evoking feeling from a raga. Many performers of the Jaipur *gharana*, for instance, have now begun to preface their recitals with slow *alap* in the Kirana mode, which would have been unthinkable for them, fifty years ago.

This is true of some other *gharanas* as well. In fact the walls of the *gharanas* have become more porous than they used to be and there is much unconscious borrowing and lending in a competitive spirit. With the greater access provided by electronic aids and increased physical mobility, there is much more exchange as well as contact, acknowledged and unacknowledged, between the *gharanas* and many examples of mixed *gayakis* are audible on concert stages today. The interesting fact is that today no singer or player of any school can resist the lure of the slow *badhat*, which used to be the exclusive preserve of the Kirana School. Even those who point out that the emphasis given to this aspect is lop-sided cannot but extend a silent respect to the meditative *vilambit* and leisurely *badhat* of the Kirana style. The most conclusive and effective compliment to this speciality is that it is imitated across all frontiers of *gharana* or style and has gained not only acceptability but also universal prestige. At the same time it must be admitted in fairness, that some Kirana singers in their turn try to outdo the *tayyari* or fast singing which is a speciality of other *gharanas* and not their own forte in an effort to measure up and not be found wanting in any aspect. Even so, it is possible to distinguish the special traits that were originally contributed by the Kirana *gharana*.

The melodic line and sense of structure

One outstanding feature of the Kirana *gayaki* is the refined sculpting of the melodic line. The practitioners of the Kirana style tend to regard the entire scale as a continuous flow of musicality and not a series of separate notes. Conceptually, every phrase in a raga is represented by a flowing line, which passes smoothly through all the gradations of the participating notes without revealing the joints. The extremely fine tuning of the intonation of the line conveys the emotional intention, subtly and enduringly, as though it were not a string of notes

Ustad Shakoor Khan, sarangi-nawaz

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but a single musical sound with a distinct expression. In other words, the Kirana sensibility aspires to absorb the emotional ambience and aura of a particular limb of the raga instead of hearing a series of notes separately and literally. This *gayaki* abhors angles and abrupt breaks so that the continuity of the spirals that the voice traces is maintained. It is the unceasing effort of all practitioners to make this their second nature. Attention is given not only to where the melodic line originates and ends, but also to its thickness or thinness at any given point. This type of detailed and delicate calligraphy lends the music a third dimension of physical depth, which is palpable to the ear.

Another speciality of the Kirana approach is that the raga is conquered not by treading relentlessly up and down its scale but by locating and controlling the crucial pressure points in its structure. For instance in most *sapoorna* ragas, an understanding of the function of the *nishadh* and the *madhyam*, or of *rishabh* and *dhaivata*, or of any two notes and their mutual relationship holds the key that could open the doors to the raga's innermost recesses. These are not accessible by mere force of practice. As a corollary to this way of looking at the raga, the typical Kirana singer fashions even his fast *taans* from a structural rather than an ornamental point of view, that is to say he takes into cognisance the vital organs and anatomy of the raga with a view to capturing its distinctive flavour and essence. He is not content merely with weaving attractive note patterns that may be pleasant to the ear. The progress of the perfect Kirana *taan* thus satisfies the connoisseur's sense of structure as much as and sometimes even more than, his melodic expectations.

Restraint as a musical value

Another area of subtlety is the use of silence as well as understatement as an effective musical elements. The comparatively low-key sensibility of the Kirana singers is also expressed in their leisurely but meticulous attention to the *mandra saptak*. As we have already seen, the raga is developed note by note in the manner of a pyramid. The tempo of the music also rises as the structure progresses. When the apex of the pyramid, the *taar shadaja*, is reached, it is not punished overtly and repeatedly as in many other styles, but merely suggested as though the music was being completed in the

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mind rather than physically. An example of this is found in the music of Amir Khan who adopted this attitude from the Kirana principles and carried it to an extreme because it admirably suited his introspective and meditative nature.

The cursory treatment of the *antara* in a *bandish* can be seen in the music of Abdul Wahid Khan. This indicates a preference for under-statement and gesture over physical completeness. A mere pointer to the *taar saptak* which finally reveals the face of a raga can sometimes be more aesthetically satisfying to an evolved musical taste than an overt and detailed treatment of that area. Abdul Wahid Khan never repeated the *antara* on principle and preferred to position it in such a manner that it did not occupy the whole space of the *vilambit taal* cycle, usually the fourteen beat *jhoomra*, but accommodated itself within ten or eleven *matras*. It is well known that most traditional vilambit *khayal* compositions that have been handed down through this stream allow three or four beats to pass after the *sam* before the *antara* is taken up. The significance of this practice is only psychological in that it reflects a kind of restraint, and a faith that musically, suggestion and delicacy are more appealing than outright statement and mechanical reiteration.

All singers of the Kirana *gharana* share this conviction in their different ways and to varying extents. And yet each has an emphatic individuality. In fact, the test of a genuine *gharana* is not only that at least three generations must have upheld the tradition but also that each single exponent should be able to express his individuality and leave his personal stamp on the music. If this condition is not met, then the teaching is open to the charge of being nothing more than an opportunity to imitate. The gurus of the Kirana *gharana* pride themselves on their ability to transmit the technique of the art so that their followers can distinguish their own musical urges from the mannerisms of their masters and still express them through the traditional idiom they have been taught. The success of their efforts is borne out by the fact that the music of each singer of the Kirana *gharana* reflects an original individual personality and not a stereotype.

◀ *Roshan Ara Begum*

Among the disciples Abdul Karim Khan groomed are Roshan Ara Begum, Ganesh Ramachandra Behere, Balakrishnabua Kapileshwari, Firoz Dastoor and Sawai Gandharva who in turn trained Gangubai Hangal and Bhimsen

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Joshi. Each of these artists has a distinct style even though they adhere to the same principles. This also applies to Abdul Wahid Khan's star pupil Hirabai Barodekar, a daughter of Abdul Karim Khan, who in her turn became the idol of singers like Manik Verma and Prabha Atre. In the course of his stay in Lahore, the master also taught Jeevan Lal Mattoo, his son Jawaharlal Mattoo and his daughter-in-law Madhuri Mattoo. All three were lifelong practitioners. Another faithful pupil was Pran Nath who dedicated his entire life to upholding and popularising the style and musical attitudes of his guru. In the USA where he spent the latter part of his life, he continued to teach the music of the Kirana School according to his lights and built up an extensive archive of recordings of compositions bequeathed to him by his master.

In general it can be said that the sub-stream represented by Abdul Wahid Khan is drier and more austere than the evocative and poignant manner of Abdul Karim Khan, but from the technical standpoint, most people regard the former more authoritative. The attitudes of the two masters colour their musical expression also. The accents of Abdul Karim Khan are tender, full of love and go straight to the heart. It is said that he was greatly influenced by the feeling that *thumri* singers like Moijuddin Khan were able to evoke in their music. On the other hand, the utterance of Abdul Wahid Khan, though equally persuasive, was somewhat intimidating in comparison.

◀ *Clockwise from top, Hirabai Barodekar Pandit Bhimsen Joshi Ustad Mashkoor Khan Gangubai Hangal*

Kirana Gharana

NAYAK GOPALJI
South Indian Brahmin
from the darbar of ALLAUDIN KHILJI

- Nayak Dhondu
  - Ghazi Khan
    - Rahim Ali
      - Shahab Khan
        - NanneKhan
          - Jeedan — *Married to Hyder Baksh*
            - *Students* Abdul Wahid Khan & Rajab Ali Khan
          - Rahim Baksh
        - Ilahi Baksh
        - Ahmed Baksh
        - Mehboob Baksh
          - Rahman Baksh — *Serving at Jaipur Darbar*
            - Rashid Khan
            - Hamid Khan
              - Baby Khan
              - Sattar Khan
            - Majid Khan
              - Shakoor Khan
              - Noor Hasan Khan
            - Abdul Bashir Khan
              - Fayyaz Ahmed Khan
              - NIYAZ AHMED KHAN
        - Khuda Baksh
      - Vajid Ali Khan
        - Kale Khan
          - Abdul Latif Khan
          - Abdul Haqq Khan
          - Abdul Karim Khan
            - Roshan Ara — *daughter*
            - Tarabai — *wife*
              - Suresh Babu Mane
              - Hirabai Barodekar
              - Saraswati Rane
              - Abdul Rehman
        - Shende Khan
        - Abdulla Khan
  - Gullu Khan
    - Ghulam Maula Khan
      - Ilahi Baksh
        - Abdul Rahim
          - Abdul Gafur Khan
            - Gani Khan
            - Shakoor Khan
              - Mubarak Ali Khan
              - Mashkoor Ali Khan
            - Abdul Haqq Khan
        - Abdul Majid
          - Habib Khan
      - Dhomi Khan
    - Hussain Ali Khan — *Hingarang*

- Nayak Bhannu
  - Khalifa Razani Khan — *Beenkar*
    - Khalifa Mohd. Zama Khan — *Beenkar*
      - *Son* Allarakha Khan — *Hori Dhrupad Gayak*
        - Abdul Aziz Khan
        - Abdul Rehman Khan
        - Abdul Wahid Khan
          - Hafizulla Khan
            - Samiulla Khan
          - Akhtar Nawaz
            - Arshad Ali Khan — *Youngest in the lineage*
      - *Relative* Langde Hussain Khan
        - Ghulam Azam Khan
          - *Cousins*
            - Hussain Ali — *Beenkar*
            - Khadim Hussain Khan — *Beenkar*
        - Ghulam Kasim Khan
        - Ghulam Taki Khan
          - Saddiq Ali Khan
            - Bande Ali Khan
              - *Daughters*
                - Umrao Jan — *Married to Allabande Khan*
                - Kanniz — *Married to Zakiruddin Khan*
            - Hyder Ali Khan
        - Ghulam Zamin Khan

Compiled by Ustad Mashkoor Ali Khan

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Ustad Niaz Ahmed and Faiyyaz Ahmed Khan

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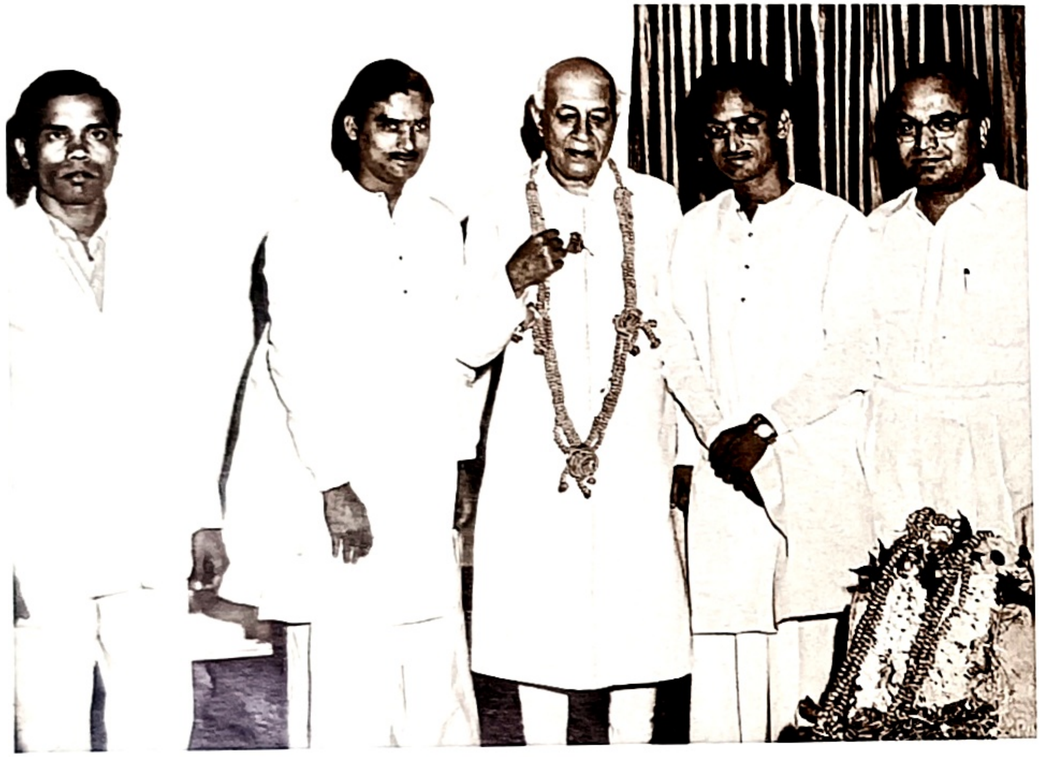
"Maulana" and his "Bhai Sahib"

The clean, disciplined and self-denying life style of Niaz Ahmed Khan has earned him the title of Maulana. Not only his extended family, but the entire music world knows him by that epithet. His dedication to the purity and practices of the Kirana *gharana* is a matter of faith with him. But there are lesser-known facets of his personality, which occasionally surprise his devotees. His forte is a systematic and meticulous style of raga development, but he can on occasion render the most touching and emotional *thumri* in the vein of Abdul Karim Khan. He once ended a concert in Bombay with the famous *jamuna ke teer* in Bhairavi and there was hardly a dry eye in the hall when he finished. Some of us have even heard him sing a beautiful *dhun* he composed for a *ghazal*, in a rare light mood. He stopped in embarrassment when his elder brother happened to walk in accidentally, but everyone present, including his elder brother, was amazed at the range of his musical sensibilities.

The performance mode of the two brothers was quite different from the teaching one. One might well ask how two separate people can possibly express their innermost musical urges together, and yet this is exactly what they succeeded in doing. In fact, as performers also they achieved more in partnership than they would have as individuals. They used their separate strengths as an advantage to extend the reach of their music. Each in turn securely held the frame of the structure they built up, leaving the other free to explore the furthest limits of his imagination. Faiyyaz Ahmed Khan skilfully and delicately filled in the colours of the raga, while Niaz Ahmed Khan animated it with brilliant embellishments and *taan* patterns. Neither would have been able to go as far as they did in their own preferred area of creativity but for the support and strength of the other. Fortunately for posterity, an example of their best work is available in a series of recordings by HMV. The Yaman recorded by the two brothers



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is a feat of musicianship, which is universally acknowledged as a definitive interpretation of the raga and is still referred to and cited by aspiring singers.

There were some values, which they stressed again and again and one of them was spontaneity. They seldom discussed or rehearsed what they were going to sing together. What they might thus have lost in physical slickness was more than made up by the freshness and genuineness of their expression. " *Nit naya*" was a constant ideal they followed. For them, nothing could be less desirable than stale musical clichés. They never encouraged their students to pre-plan their recitals, but always urged them to be true to the moment and listen to what the tuned tanpura seemed to be suggesting before deciding what they felt like singing.

The sculpting of the melodic line and the *meendh* was a constant concern for them. Every student was required to understand and observe their very strict rules about the movement of the line. They tirelessly explained how to raise a note, how to stay on it, how to leave it and how to travel to the next note. There were also very detailed principles that governed where the voice should apply force and where it should be allowed to drop by itself. Their formulations were so strict that they used to remind us of the laws of gravity. The structural use of *kana* was another extremely important lesson that they tirelessly stressed and asked all their pupils to practise. They explained to us that the emotional expression of a musical phrase depended on the movement and conduct of a melodic line, including the *sut*, or fine thread of sound with which a musical phrase fades out and so it was deserving of the most delicate attention. There were numerous such refinements in their teaching, which they normally undertook separately, so that the pupil could concentrate better on the matter in hand. They were rarely present at a lesson together, unless there was a specific reason for it.

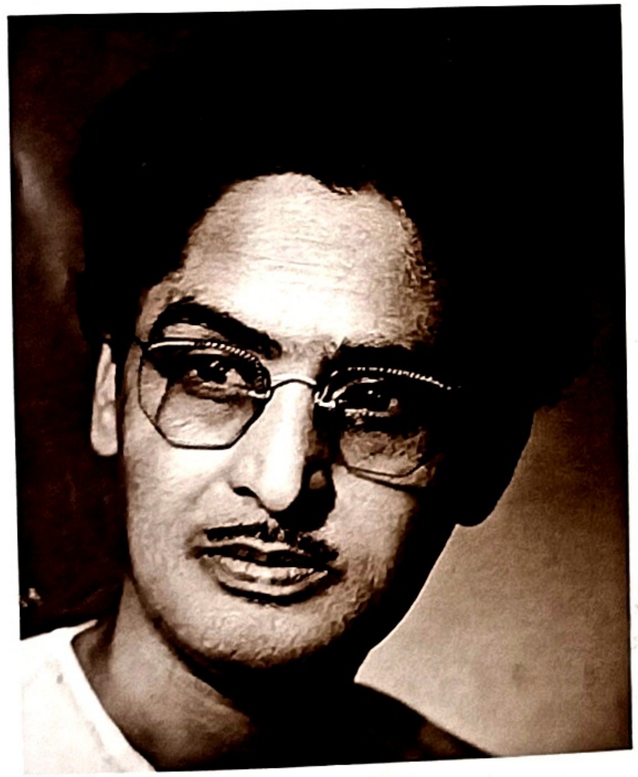
◀▲ *The Ustads with Prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru in Bombay*

◀ *Niaz Ahmed Khan with President Fakruddin Ali Ahmed at the Padmashri awards ceremony*

The compositions of Faiyyaz Ahmed Khan, or Gunarang, are very special and bear his unmistakable stamp. They have the aroma of the graceful *khayals* of a bygone age and carry within them all the sensitivity and depth required for a complete grasp of the intention of a raga. For many listeners, these khayals used to be an added attraction at any concert of the two brothers. Even after his death in 1987, Niaz Ahmed Khan and some performing pupils feature these

Ustad Faiyyaz Ahmed Khan in 1938

Ustad Faiyyaz Ahmed Khan



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compositions in their recitals, as they are masterpieces in a distinctive style, which one associates with the *gayaki* of the two brothers.

One quality which stands out in these compositions is that they do not lose their sense of repose, however accelerated the *laya* might be in the *drut*. Usually the exact pitches of the notes of a raga have to be sacrificed for the sake of speed and *tayyari*. Nor can the arches of the *meendhs* be faithfully traced in the fury of the increased tempo. This is not the case in the compositions of Maulana's beloved "Bhai Sahib". There are numerous examples. To pick some at random, his *drut ektal* compositions in Megh and Mian-ki-Malhar, or his *taranas* in Malkauns and Kausi Kanhra, are feats of musicianship as well as aesthetics, which uphold the ancient values of purity and restraint. These compositions have been added to the repertoire of the common pool and are a living proof of the invaluable contribution of the two brothers to their inherited legacy.

It is rare indeed to find the highest standards of professional ability mingle so easily and comfortably with the broad sympathies and human qualities for which Niaz Ahmed Khan and Faiyyaz Ahmed Khan are so widely known. In our own cynical times, where self-interest and self-propagation seem to be the only surviving values, this might well be their most enduring and far-reaching contribution.

The Felicitation Programme

A Santoor recital by
PANDIT SHIV KUMAR SHARMA

accompanied

on the tabla by
USTAD ZAKIR HUSSEIN

and

a vocal recital by
USTAD MASHKOOR ALI KHAN

On 29th February 2000
at the
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